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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1485
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RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1465
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SUBJECT: TAJIK AND AFGHAN BUSINESSWOMEN NETWORK AT KHATLON
CONFERENCE

1. Maybe sewing really IS women's work? At a March 29 conference in Qurghon-Teppa, 50 Tajik and Afghan women entrepreneurs came together to network and seek business cooperation, but had few examples of success outside the sectors of handicraft. Enthusiasm and energy were abundant, but the conference did not host one Tajik woman who had broken the barrier to running a successful broader-based trade enterprise. Almost all of the discussions focused on handicraft production and marketing except for a few mentions of women involved in farming.

2. How Afghan businesswomen could learn from the experience of their Tajik counterparts dominated the discussions. One Tajik entrepreneur from a small village told an insightful and touching story about painstakingly building a handicraft business from just a few somoni to a televised meeting this month with President Rahmonov with all the women wearing traditional dresses her NGO had sewn and sold. Several other Tajik NGO representatives discussed their entrepreneur-promoting activities, especially micro-lending, and how just a few outreach centers had positively impacted the lives of thousands of impoverished women by giving them technical assistance to participate in the handicraft industry. In addition, local Tajik government officials expressed their appreciation for NGOs providing business and legal guidance to women starting small businesses.

3. Prospects for reviving traditional trade between the Khatlon region and northern Afghanistan also briefly were discussed in the context of the Nizhny Pyanj bridge under construction and shared language and culture. Seventy percent of goods consumed in Kunduz come from China, 10 percent from Iran, five percent from Pakistan, and about 10 percent locally produced. Goods from China, Iran, and Pakistan amass substantial transportation

costs that could be significantly decreased if the same goods were imported from Tajikistan. Potential items for trade include: wool, fruits and vegetables, clothes, tea, candies, medicine, oil, honey, and carpets.

14. The conference was the second day in a three-day trip for the Kunduz and Takhar-based businesswomen to visit local Tajik nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Khatlon and network. This trip was the first by Afghan women to the Khatlon region, although some of the Afghan entrepreneurs previously participated in a similar trip to Tajikistan's northern industrial Khujand city. The regional Khatlon district government, a local NGO Sapeda, and the Eurasia Foundation jointly sponsored the event, where the DCM gave opening remarks.

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